

14 July 1987

Talking Points for ADDI's HPSCI Briefing

Current Situation in Panama

As you know from the newspapers, the lifting of the state of emergency at the end of June set the stage for both pro- and anti-Noriega demonstrators to take to the streets.

-- On 30 June, civilian supporters of the regime staged a large protest at the US Embassy that degenerated into rockthrowing hooliganism as Defense Forces personnel stood aside. Two days later, police stood by while businesses belonging to opposition leaders were firebombed, and the regime shut down an antigovernment radio station.

-- The political opposition attacked the regime in the media and engaged in peaceful protests--such as motorcades throughout the city at certain hours and a march by some 6,000 women on 5 July. [redacted]

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[redacted] Defense Chief Noriega reluctantly agreed to President Delvalle's ban on last Thursday's progovernment rally and Friday's opposition demonstration.

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-- The military effectively disrupted opposition efforts to defy the ban. Up to 300 people were temporarily detained, including ten US citizens, and several were injured. No deaths have been reported. [redacted]

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Delvalle's call for dialogue and an investigation of the allegations against Noriega and the military on 5 July was an attempt to boost the President's tarnished image. The speech was dismissed out of hand by the opposition.

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[redacted]

Noriega's support within the military remains solid, but there are cracks evident in the ruling coalition.

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[redacted]

-- Vice President Esquivel staked out some independent political turf for his small Liberal Party last week when he seconded Delvalle's call for an investigation of the charges leveled against Noriega and the military. He also criticized the government for inhibiting constitutional rights.

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- [REDACTED]
- Esquivel, who has a reputation for being outspoken, is distrusted by the military, which probably will view his recent criticisms of the regime as a good reason to retain Delvalle. [REDACTED]

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The opposition appears to be gaining new members, but the movement still lacks a charismatic leader to take the place of perennial dissident Arnulfo Arias, whose advanced age finally has removed him from the political fray.

- According to the Embassy, the Civil Crusade has grown from 30 to more than 100 businesses, civic, and professional groups.
- Nonetheless, the most recent general business strike initiated by the Civil Crusade was only partially successful. Crusade leaders admit that the regime's strong influence over organized labor has muted strike efforts.
- The opposition intends to continue its nonviolent protest tactics in an effort to bring down the regime. The direct impact of these protests on the regime is negligible, but the continuing unrest is adversely affecting investor and business confidence. [REDACTED]

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The regime recently has muted the anti-US rhetoric that followed the US Senate resolution calling on General Noriega to step down, and it obviously ✓ does not want a permanent downturn in relations.

[REDACTED]

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